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**For More Information Contact**

Jeff Caldwell (804) 864-7008

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**NEW INITIATIVE AIMED AT INCREASING HEALTH INSURANCE  
ACCESSIBILITY FOR VIRGINIA SMALL BUSINESS EMPLOYEES**

*Virginia State Planning Grant Program Will Provide Employers Useful Information  
On Area Health Insurance Options*

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) launched a program today that will provide area-specific information about the costs and availability of health insurance plans to the state's small business owners. The initiative is aimed at making health coverage more accessible for small business employees, who make up a substantial portion of Virginia's uninsured population.

The publication "A Guide to Health Insurance Options for Small Businesses in Virginia," was funded through a Virginia State Planning Grant and will be widely distributed through Small Business Development Centers and state and local Chamber of Commerce offices. The information can also be accessed on the Internet at [www.InsureMoreVirginians.org/SmallBusinessGuide](http://www.InsureMoreVirginians.org/SmallBusinessGuide).

"We know that many Virginia small business owners want to provide health insurance to their employees, but they don't have the time or resources to research what kind of plans are available and how much they cost," said Rene Cabral-Daniels, director of the VDH Office of Health Policy and Planning. "Now, these employers will have data at their fingertips on not only cost and availability of specific plans, but also useful information on the advantages of providing health insurance to their workers."

The handbook and Web site are modeled after a program initiated by the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC), a coalition of the nation's leading health care companies and institutions, and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Governor-elect Tim Kaine, as Lieutenant Governor, created and headed a commission on small business health care costs, which recommended replicating the Healthcare Leadership Council's program across the Commonwealth.

"Too many people aren't getting the preventive health care they need because they don't have access to health insurance," said Governor-elect Kaine. "Providing small business owners with easy-to-access insurance resources is a step in the right direction for Virginia's economy and Virginia's families."

The HLC has piloted the approach in different jurisdictions and discovered that linking business owners with user-friendly information on health insurance can make a specific impact.

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“It is impossible to overstate the importance of this issue and, likewise, the significance of what the state of Virginia is doing,” said HLC president Mary R. Grealy. “A high number of uninsured citizens results in higher health care costs for everyone. By contrast, a workforce with health coverage tends to be more productive, has less absenteeism and experiences less turnover.”

For more information, go to [www.InsureMoreVirginians.org/SmallBusinessGuide](http://www.InsureMoreVirginians.org/SmallBusinessGuide). To learn more about resources available to assist the uninsured in Virginia, visit the State Planning Grant Web site at [www.InsureMoreVirginians.org/individualresources.html](http://www.InsureMoreVirginians.org/individualresources.html)

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